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Make Room for Daddy: The Journey from Waiting Room to Birthing Room

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Make Room for Daddy: The Journey from Waiting Room to Birthing Room (review)

Rosemary Mander

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mendable piece of scholarship, completing the link between cultural theory, religious studies, and history.

Robert S. Weise
Eastern Kentucky University

Make Room for Daddy: The Journey from Waiting Room to Birthing Room.
By Ruth Walzer Leavitt (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2009) 448 pp. \$35.00

How fathers made their way into the birthing room is the story of their triumph over entrenched institutional resistance. On their way, fathers forged alliances and overcame powerful opponents. Their changing territory provides a metaphor for their involvement in the woman's birth experience—starting with their lack of *any* place in traditional home birth, through their relegation to keeping “vigil” in the waiting room while their wives labored in a nearby “delivery” room, to what is presented as their final destination, the birthing room, where they supposedly became equal partners.

Leavitt recounts this journey using a range of familiar sources—interviews and popular media, particularly television, which started to come into its own just as fathers made their first faltering steps into the birthing room. She also consults selections from the mid-twentieth-century “Fathers’ Books”—reminiscences and reflections of fathers derived from notebooks provided in the “Stork Club,” the name given to the waiting room near the hospital labor ward. Fathers were encouraged both to record their own reflections and to read those of their predecessors.

These journals constitute a veritable goldmine of delectable data about fathers’ experiences. Their comments demonstrate joy and pain but, most of all, the agonizing tedium of waiting. The value of these testimonies may be constrained to some extent by their restriction to literate fathers—a potential source of bias about which Leavitt does not remark. Moreover, Leavitt gives disappointingly little attention to the origins of this extraordinarily significant data source. She relies exclusively on material from Chicago, Illinois, and Madison, Wisconsin, although other midwestern states also took part in the program. Leavitt does not discuss why the books emerged in this setting and not in others.

The three major parts of Leavitt’s book are not particularly well integrated. The popular media sources and interviews combine with the Fathers’ Books to form the main part of the text. The final part comprises an “Epilogue,” strangely entitled “Expectant Fathers’ Expectations.” The material in this section differs substantially from the major part of the book, almost contradicting it. The epilogue adopts a critical and analytical approach to the presence of fathers, posing a wealth of

crucially important questions. This section is cogently supported, though not as plentifully supported as the other chapters, which draw on a wider and more populist literature base. In it, Leavitt neglects the abundance of research evidence demonstrating the less favorable and less frequently publicized aspects of the fathers' experience.

Leavitt's book contains a wealth of amusing illustrations, though they are not always fully integrated into the text. Providing a little more context for them would have facilitated a better understanding of fathers' experiences. Although Leavitt frequently attends to the medicalization of childbearing, she fails to mention certain other concurrent developments, such as the changing role and increasing contribution of the obstetric anaesthetist.¹ Linked with the medicalization of childbearing is the Irish leviathan, termed "active management of labour."² It is possible that health systems' global economic problems and the resultant staff shortages may have facilitated fathers' welcome into the labor, delivery, and birthing room.³ These late twentieth-century innovations are difficult to detach from the entry of another person into the birthing room—the doula.

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Where We Live Now: Immigration and Race in the United States. By John Iceland (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2009) 223 pp. \$50.00 cloth \$19.95 paper

Spatial assimilation, a key benchmark of immigrants' integration in receiving countries, refers to the process whereby immigrants move away from ethnic enclaves, usually located in poorer areas of a city where housing is cheap, and attain residential propinquity with members of the dominant, native-born population in wealthier, middle-class neighborhoods. Virtually every immigrant group that settled in the United States experienced residential segregation from white Americans, at least initially. For instance, Irish and German enclaves were prevalent in American cities during the nineteenth century, whereas Italian and Russian Jewish ghettos dotted the urban landscape during the first quarter of the twentieth century. Over time, as European immigrants became acculturated and climbed up the socioeconomic ladder, however, they were able to co-reside with white Americans, and eventually become bona fide Americans themselves—blurring the spatial and social boundaries

1 Mander, "Epidural Analgesia 1: Recent History," *British Journal of Midwifery*, 1 (1993), 259–264.

2 Kieran O'Driscoll and Declan Meagher, *Active Management of Labour* (London, 1980).

3 Janet M. Corrigan, Ann Greiner, and Shari M. Erickson, *Fostering Rapid Advances in Health Care: Learning from System Demonstrations* (Washington, D.C., 2003).